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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000526

SIPDIS

STATE PASS USTR
USDA FOR HEGWOOD
USDA FOR FAS WASHDC PRIORITY
USDA FOR FAS/OA/CHAMBLISS AND SLUTSKY, COTS/BLUM,
ITP/SHEIKH AND MACKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/7/08

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [IT](#) [PGOV](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY/BIOTECH: GOVERNMENT SPLIT CONTINUES

REF: 02 ROME 6137

CLASSIFIED BY: ECONOMIC MINISTER-COUNSELOR SCOTT KILNER FOR REASONS 1.5
(B)(D)

- [1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: DESPITE SOME RECENT PRO-BIOTECH STATEMENTS FROM OUR ALLIES IN THE GOI, ITALIAN BIOTECH POLICY CONTINUES TO BE DRIVEN BY AGRICULTURE MINISTER ALEMANNO AND HIS ANTI-BIOTECH MESSAGE. THE PRIME MINISTER APPEARS TO REMAIN UNWILLING TO RISK FRICTION WITH ALEMANNO'S FACTION OF THE AN PARTY, BERLUSCONI'S KEY PARTNER IN THE GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, VOICES OPPOSED TO ALEMANNO ARE GROWING LOUDER. END SUMMARY.
- [1](#)2. (C) FOLLOWING A JANUARY 22 MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI AND VISITING AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESIDENT THOMAS DONAHUE, DONAHUE ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY THAT THE PM HAD TOLD HIM THE GOI WOULD CONDUCT A POLICY REVIEW ON BIOTECHNOLOGY, WITH AN EYE TOWARD DEVELOPING A NEW POSITION BY THE SUMMER. THE EXCHANGE WAS LATER CONFIRMED BY OUR CONTACTS IN THE ITALY AMCHAM WHO SAT IN ON THE MEETING.
- [1](#)3. (SBU) MINISTER OF PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES ANTONIO MARZANO, SPEAKING AT A JANUARY 23 SYMPOSIUM, SEEMED TO ECHO THIS POSITION, ENDORSING ALSO AN END TO THE EU MORATORIUM ON BIOTECH APPROVALS. HIS COMMENTS WERE REINFORCED AT THE SAME CONFERENCE BY ITALIAN SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MAURIZIO RONCONI, WHO ARGUED THAT IT WAS ILLUSORY TO SUSTAIN THE THEORY OF A GM-FREE ITALY, AND THAT IT WAS TIME TO END THE MORATORIUM.
- [1](#)4. (SBU) HOWEVER, AGRICULTURE MINISTER ALEMANNO, AT THE SAME EVENT, ARGUED THAT "THE RISKS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY FAR OUTWEIGH THE BENEFITS" AND REAFFIRMED HIS INSISTENCE THAT ITALY REMAIN BIOTECH-FREE IN AGRICULTURE. IN AN INTERVIEW THE FOLLOWING DAY, ALEMANNO SAID THAT HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND MARZANO'S COMMENTS AND THAT THEY NEEDED CLARIFICATION. ALEMANNO ADMITTED THAT THERE WAS NO PROVEN HEALTH RISK FROM GMOS NOW ON THE MARKET, BUT HINTED ABOUT LONG-TERM RISKS. HE INSISTED THAT AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY HAS NO PLACE IN ITALIAN AGRICULTURE. ITALIAN AGRICULTURE, HE ASSERTED, IS "QUALITY AGRICULTURE" AND "HAS LITTLE TO GAIN BY INTRODUCING BIOTECHNOLOGIES," ADDING THAT "GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS WOULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE OUR IMAGE AND OUR ECONOMY." ASKED WHETHER THERE WAS ANY PROSPECT AT ALL OF INTRODUCING GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS IN ITALIAN AGRICULTURE, HE RESPONDED: "NO, IN MY OPINION, FOR THE TIME BEING THERE IS TO BE NO TALK OF IT."
- [1](#)5. (C) SUBSEQUENT TO THESE EVENTS, THE AMBASSADOR HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEEK CLARIFICATION FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHIEF DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR, GIOVANNI CASTELLANETA, AS TO WHETHER PM BERLUSCONI TRULY INTENDED A SERIOUS REVIEW OF GOI BIOTECH POLICY, AS DOHAHUE HAD HEARD (AND MARZANO HAD STATED). CASTELLANETA REPLIED THAT THERE MUST HAVE BEEN "SOME MISUNDERSTANDING;" BERLUSCONI HAD ONLY MEANT TO CONVEY THAT HE WOULD "TRY AGAIN" TO DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH AGRICULTURE MINISTER ALEMANNO.
- [1](#)6. (C) COMMENT: WHILE AGRICULTURE MINISTER ALEMANNO APPEARS TO REMAIN IN THE BIOTECH POLICY DRIVER'S SEAT FOR NOW, AND PM BERLUSCONI SO FAR REMAINS UNWILLING TO FORCE THE ISSUE, IT IS NOT INSIGNIFICANT THAT PRO-BIOTECH VOICES IN THE GOVERNMENT ARE GROWING LOUDER.
- SEMBLER